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Implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development and of the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly

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Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report is submitted in compliance with General Assembly resolution 58/130. In preparation for the 10-year review of the further implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development and the review of the outcome of the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly, in 2005, the report recalls the various priority themes considered by the Commission for Social Development since the conclusion of the Summit in March 1995. It also provides an analysis of the agreed conclusions adopted by the Commission on these themes and selects a few issues which appear to be of particular importance 10 years later.

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I. Introduction

1. The present report has been prepared in compliance with General Assembly resolution 58/130 of 22 December 2003, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit a report to the Assembly on the implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development and of the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly. The report is the tenth in a series of reports on this subject since the holding of the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen in March 1995.

2. With regard to the follow-up to and review of the further implementation of the commitments made at the Summit and the further initiatives agreed upon at the twenty-fourth special session, the Assembly, in its resolution 58/130, reaffirmed that the Commission for Social Development will continue to have the primary responsibility in this regard and encouraged Governments, the relevant specialized agencies, funds and programmes of the United Nations system and civil society to enhance their support to its work.

3. In the same resolution, the Assembly, noting that the Commission will conduct a 10-year review of the further implementation of the outcome of the World Summit and a review of the outcome of the twenty-fourth special session, called upon the Commission to transmit to it, through the Economic and Social Council, the substantive outcome of this review for its consideration in 2005.

4. For the present report, and in preparation for the 2005 review, it might be useful to recall the various priority themes considered by the Commission for Social Development since the conclusion of the World Summit for Social Development. The report thus attempts to take stock and provide an analysis of the agreed conclusions adopted by the Commission on each of these themes and to select a few issues which appear to be of particular importance 10 years later.

II. Priority themes of the Commission: 1996-2004

5. It will be recalled that in the wake of the World Summit for Social Development, the terms of reference of the Commission for Social Development were expanded to enable it to assume its role as the primary intergovernmental body responsible for the follow-up to the Summit. In its resolution 50/161 of 22 December 1995, the General Assembly decided that a revitalized Commission for Social Development, together with the Economic and Social Council and the Assembly itself, should constitute a three-tiered intergovernmental follow-up process. The Commission was charged with the primary responsibility for the follow-up to and review of the implementation of the Summit, the Council was to provide overall guidance and coordination and the Assembly would have a role in policy formulation.

6. By its resolution 1996/7 of 22 July 1996, the Economic and Social Council decided that, in order for the Commission to fulfil its expanded mandates, it should develop a multi-year programme of work, selecting specific themes and addressing them from an interrelated and integrated perspective. The Council also adopted a new structure for the Commission's agenda and work programme, under the overall heading of "Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development". After the convening of the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly in June

2000, the heading was revised to "Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly". A list of the priority themes for the years 1996-2006 is contained in the annex to the present report.

7. The Commission first chose the three core issues addressed by the World Summit, namely, eradication of poverty, achieving full and productive employment and enhancing social integration, as its priority themes. Other themes chosen were providing social services for all, social protection, integration of social and economic policy, national and international cooperation for social development and improving public sector effectiveness.

8. The outcomes of the work of the Commission on these themes were all sent to the Economic and Social Council. While some were merely "brought to the attention of the Council", others were transmitted to the Council as contributions to the high-level segments of its substantive sessions and for "appropriate follow-up action". Still others were sent to preparatory bodies of special sessions of the General Assembly, including the sessions on social development, drug control and sustainable development. The agreed conclusions for 2003, on national and international cooperation for social development and for 2004, on improving public sector effectiveness, were sent to the Council "for its endorsement". It should be noted that the Commission, in its agreed conclusions for 2002, on integration of social and economic policy, invited the Economic and Social Council, at its high-level segment, to examine the importance of integration of social and economic policy in promoting human resources development and enhancing the process of development. The Commission was not able to adopt agreed conclusions in 2001 on its priority theme "Enhancing social protection and reducing vulnerability in a globalizing world".

9. These outcomes have not, by and large, been pursued substantively in the Economic and Social Council. It is hoped that in the context of General Assembly resolution 57/270 B of 23 June 2003 on integrated follow-up to United Nations conferences and summits, the interaction between the Council and the Commission for Social Development, and its other functional commissions, will be re-examined and strengthened, so that the outcomes of the work of the Commission can contribute more directly to policy development by the Council.

10. With regard to the content and length of these agreed conclusions, they vary from 11 to 83 paragraphs. It is noted that over the years, the Commission has been aiming at adopting short outcomes. Their contents have also changed from being very detailed, covering as many related aspects as possible, to those of a more general nature. There have been recent proposals to adopt resolutions instead of agreed conclusions, but up to 2004, the outcomes on its priority themes have been in the form of agreed conclusions.

III. Analysis of the outcomes of the work of the Commission on its priority themes

11. The texts adopted over the years by the Commission for Social Development in the form of agreed conclusions on priority themes for the implementation of the outcome of the Summit are rich and informative. They are not only faithful to the

spirit, orientations and objectives of the text adopted in Copenhagen in 1995 by all countries — a large number of them having been represented by heads of State or Government — but they also often have an added value in terms of policy recommendations or clarification of complex issues, especially when accompanied in the report of the Commission by additional summaries on deliberations of panels. Such richness is particularly noticeable in the first years after the Summit when the Commission considered successively the questions of poverty, employment, social integration, social services and contributions to the five-year review. The latter became part of the outcome of the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly. After the five-year review in 2000, the Commission experienced more difficulties with the notion of priority themes and with the choice and treatment of issues on which its deliberations could add value vis-à-vis previously "agreed language." Nevertheless, a significant outcome was achieved, for instance, in 2002 when the Commission had a thorough debate and adopted valuable agreed conclusions on the question of integration of economic and social policies. Similarly, in 2003 and 2004, under consideration of its priority themes, the Commission adopted important resolutions on cooperation for the implementation of the social objectives of the New Partnership for Africa's Development.

12. Such outcomes of the Commission were transmitted to the Economic and Social Council and normally acknowledged and "taken note of". Although only a specific and comprehensive evaluation could indicate the extent of the influence of these inputs of the Commission on the deliberations and decisions of the Council, the overall impression, as indicated above, is that there is considerable room for improving and strengthening this interaction. Beyond the Council itself is the question of the use by national Governments and other actors of the work of the Commission on the priority themes stemming from the outcome of the Summit. Reports of the Commission have by and large been familiar to national administrations responsible for social issues and sectors, but there is little if any evidence that they have reached senior decision makers and civil servants involved in economic and financial matters. Moreover, it is often said that non-governmental organizations and associations and movements with a social agenda are relying on the normative pronouncements of the United Nations to legitimize their action. Indeed, the reports of the Commission for Social Development issued since the Summit were most probably used for that purpose. Also, the degree to which the various public and private actors, whose ideas and decisions are shaping social conditions throughout the world, have taken into account the work of the Commission on the follow-up to the Summit would seem to vary considerably.

13. Beyond imperfections in the functioning of the economic and social intergovernmental machinery of the United Nations, this situation reveals the relative importance of social development in current political thinking and practice. There is, on the surface, an agreement in national and international forums that people, their problems, needs and aspirations should be at the centre of public policies and development strategies. This essence of social development is a recurring theme of the Copenhagen text, including through the goal of creating a "society for all". In resolution S-24/2, adopted by the General Assembly at its twenty-fourth special session in 2000, it is stated that "one of the most important developments since the World Summit for Social Development in March 1995 is the increased priority which social development has been given in national and international policy objectives" and that "the Summit also signified a recognition by

States of the importance of ... placing people at the centre of development efforts" (annex, sect. II, para. 1). In 2004, perhaps with the replacement of the word "priority" by the word "visibility", this judgement would still be generally endorsed. And yet a people-centred approach to national and international public affairs remains too much of an abstract concept. Progress towards achieving the main goals of the Summit — reduction of poverty and elimination of extreme poverty, full employment and integration in stable, safe and just societies — is at best uneven. Achieving social development, or the movement towards equitable societies with equal rights and equal opportunities, continues to be characterized by a gap between intentions and actions, between proclaimed objectives and the actual orientation of national and international policies.

14. Among the many reasons for such a gap, three main issues emerge from an analysis of the work of the Commission on the follow-up to the World Summit: social aspects of globalization; macroeconomic policies and social development goals; and capacity of national Governments to undertake social policies.

A. Social aspects of globalization

15. In the Copenhagen Declaration adopted at the World Summit for Social Development, globalization is treated in one comprehensive paragraph, in which the opening of "new opportunities for sustained economic growth and development" and the "cross-fertilization of ideals, cultural values and aspirations" are hopes that are balanced by the observation that "rapid processes of change and adjustment have been accompanied by intensified poverty, unemployment and social disintegration" and that there are "threats to human well-being, such as environmental risks [that] have also been globalized".[1] This is followed by the remark that "global transformations of the world economy are profoundly changing the parameters of social development in all countries" and the conclusion that "the challenge is how to manage these processes and threats so as to enhance their benefits and mitigate their negative effects upon people". Five years later, the special session of the General Assembly devoted to review the commitments made at Copenhagen was entitled "World Summit for Social Development and beyond: achieving social development for all in a globalizing world". In the annex to its resolution S-24/2, there are several paragraphs on the economic and financial aspects of globalization and in section I, paragraph 4, the Assembly concludes, in a similar vein as the Summit, "We must act now in order to overcome those obstacles [marginalization from the global economy] affecting peoples and countries and to realize the full potential of opportunities presented for the benefit of all."

16. In the successive agreed conclusions on its priority themes, the Commission for Social Development did not move beyond the general statement that "globalization offers both opportunities and challenges". In 2003, upon examination of the theme "National and international cooperation for social development", the Commission added that "the social impact and dimension of globalization deserve further attention".[2] This was an indirect way of recognizing the launching by the International Labour Organization (ILO) of a World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization. In 2004, the agreed conclusions on improving public sector effectiveness did not address the issue of globalization and its implications. Thus, the contribution of the Commission for Social Development to a better understanding and better management of social development in a context of

globalization was not as pronounced as it could have been. At least from this vantage point, the issues raised in the Copenhagen Declaration have not been pursued to the extent that was foreseen. Increasing controversies surrounding globalization and the surge of security issues on the international agenda should not detract intergovernmental attention from the social and cultural implications of globalization and their impact on development, which should figure prominently in the work of the functional body of the Economic and Social Council responsible for social development. The report of the ILO World Commission, "A fair globalization: creating opportunities for all", provides an important opportunity for renewed, meaningful debates on these issues.

B. National and international macroeconomic policies and social goals

17. The World Summit for Social Development emphasized the need to "create an enabling economic environment aimed at promoting more equitable access for all to income, resources and social services" (Copenhagen Declaration, Commitment 1, subparagraph (b)). The first commitment includes the promotion of "dynamic, open, free markets", the recognition that public intervention is required "to prevent or counteract market failure, promote stability and long-term investment, ensure fair competition and ethical conduct, and harmonize economic and social development" (ibid., subparagraph (e)). It also includes "cooperation in the formulation and implementation of macroeconomic policies, trade liberalization [and] mobilization and/or provision of new and additional financial resources" to create a "supportive economic environment" (ibid., subparagraph (j)). Moreover, this commitment is elaborated in the first chapter of the Programme of Action, entitled "An Enabling Environment for Social Development", where, in particular, "sound and stable macroeconomic policies" are recommended for "sustained economic growth and development that is sustainable and equitable, that generate jobs, and that are geared towards eradicating poverty and reducing social and economic equalities and exclusion" (Programme of Action, chap. 1, para. 9 (b)).

18. With more emphasis and more precise recommendations on the need for additional resources, for efficient and equitable tax regimes and for a stable international financial system, the General Assembly, at its twenty-fourth special session, also recognized that social development requires a favourable economic environment. It devoted a whole section in its resolution to the mobilization of resources for social development. It recommended the institution of "systems for ensuring the ex ante assessment and continuous monitoring of the social impact of economic policies at both the international and national levels, with a particular focus on the formulation of macroeconomic policies" (resolution S-24/2, annex, sect. III, para. 8).

19. Although the Commission for Social Development never took the first commitment of the Summit as its priority theme — and it should be noted that Commitment 1 is very comprehensive, as it includes the creation not only of an economic environment but also a legal, political and cultural environment for social development — it did insist from the beginning of its work on the follow-up to the Summit on the crucial role of appropriate economic policies. This was particularly the case in 1996, when it adopted its resolution S-1996/1 on "Strategies and actions for the eradication of poverty",[3] and in 1997, with its extensive agreed conclusions

on productive employment and sustainable livelihoods.[4] In the latter, one can note, for instance, the following:

> "Countries should apply a balanced and credible macroeconomic policy mix over the medium term in order to ensure both price stability and low interest rates as well as sustainable growth, productive investment and employment. In some countries, this implies budgetary consolidation to make room for productive investment in line with rising demand. In this context, it is worth noting that there is no inherent conflict between sound macroeconomic and budget policies, on the one hand, and sustainable growth in output and employment, on the other."[5]

Moreover, in 2002, in its equally extensive agreed conclusions on the integration of social and economic policy, the Commission made several points on the need to broaden the scope of macroeconomic policy and to better understand the "causal linkages" between such policy and its social impact.[6] On that occasion, the Commission also reiterated the need for efficient and equitable tax regimes. It should also be noted that the General Assembly, in its resolution 58/130, emphasizes the importance of integrating economic and social policies in promoting human resources development and enhancing the process of development and invites the Economic and Social Council, at the highest possible level, to assess the effectiveness of such integration and make recommendations in this regard to the General Assembly. However, in 2003 and 2004, the Commission only alluded to the indispensable role of economic policies geared towards the achievement of social goals.

20. Notwithstanding the foregoing, the formulation of macroeconomic policies — including those recommended by international financial institutions — still falls short of incorporating social goals, such as full employment or access of all to essential social services. Views on what constitute "right" economic and financial policies and the "right" structural reforms are more flexible than a few years ago and the observation — strongly made by the General Assembly at its twenty-fourth special session — that expenditures on social programmes are actually productive for the economy and for society — are gaining acceptance in national and international decision-making circles. However, there remain considerable substantive and political difficulties for national and international economic policies to be efficient and coherent and at the same time conducive to better living conditions for all. This is an issue that is also at the core of the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals, notably, the reduction of poverty.

C. Capacity of national Governments to undertake social policies

21. In United Nations intergovernmental texts, social issues and social policies are usually presented as being primarily a national responsibility. Calls for international cooperation and for international assistance to countries in need are normally preceded by a clear pronouncement that the organization of one's society and the response to domestic social problems are matters of national sovereignty and are politically and culturally rooted. Typical in this regard is the formulation by the Summit: we "recognize that, while social development is a national responsibility, it cannot be successfully achieved without the collective commitment and efforts of the international community" (Copenhagen Declaration, para. 26 (c)) and "on the

basis of our common pursuit of social development ... with full respect for national sovereignty ... and religious and cultural diversity, ... we launch a global drive for social progress and development" (ibid., para. 29). Furthermore, within countries, a number of actors have to be involved in social development, starting with individuals acting as citizens, but public authorities must play a leading role:

> "We acknowledge that it is the primary responsibility of States to attain these [social] goals. We also acknowledge that these goals cannot be achieved by States alone. ... all regional organizations and local authorities, and all actors of civil society need to positively contribute their own share of efforts and resources ..." (ibid., para. 27).

To these principles, the General Assembly, at its twenty-fourth special session, after having called for further actions to implement the Copenhagen commitments, added the following: "It has ... become clear that there is no single universal path to achieving social development and that all have experience, knowledge and information worth sharing" (resolution S-24/2, annex, sect. I, para. 3). The Commission for Social Development has constantly endorsed these views, even extending them to development as a whole: "Each country has primary responsibility for its own economic and social development and the role of national policies and development strategies cannot be overemphasized."[7]

22. However, at the same time that the primary responsibility of countries and States for social development is reaffirmed, there is a perception that the actual exercise of such responsibility is increasingly difficult, at least for two reasons. Firstly, there are issues of institutional development and of administrative capacity to design, implement and monitor social policies and programmes, which have long been on the international agenda and have been part of international cooperation and technical assistance projects. In the course of the last decade, these issues have been closely related with governance, democracy and the avoidance of corruption, with an emphasis on the creation of an environment conducive to the free interplay of market forces. Secondly, countries, and notably their public authorities, appear to be losing some of their policy-making autonomy as they become part of a globalized and interdependent world economy. As stated by the General Assembly at its twenty-fourth special session: "If anything, these forces [of globalization] have accelerated and often strained the capacity of Governments and the international community to manage them for the benefit of all. ... national environments have been increasingly affected by global influences and forces beyond the control of individual Governments. ... the years since the Summit have also been marked by growing constraints on the capacity for public action. In some countries, increased constraints, including fiscal and political ones on Governments, have resulted in a reduction in the programmes and activities of the State." (see resolution S-24/2, sect. II, paras. 2, 3 and 42).

IV. Conclusion and recommendation

23. **Social development, as seen by the World Summit for Social Development, requires systematic efforts at all levels of policy-making to place people at the centre of public strategies and public actions. People, and the improvement of their living conditions in dignity and freedom, are the ultimate objective of public policies. Moreover, their degree of participation largely determines the**

legitimacy and quality of these public policies. Such a people-centred approach to social progress and development is still to be achieved. Acute problems of society, such as the incidence of extreme poverty, often accompanied by insecurity, are receiving increased attention, as is evidenced by the visibility of the Millennium Development Goals. Yet, concrete and efficient means of implementation still leave much to be desired. A comprehensive list of these means would include the perennial question of resources and would be long and diversified, as national and local conditions vary enormously. However, the three issues selected above from the work of the Commission for Social Development on the follow-up to the Summit appear to be of general relevance for countries at different levels of development and of particular interest to those that are struggling to define their position and role in a globalizing and interdependent world economy. The social aspects of globalization, the compatibility and contribution of macroeconomic policies with and to social development goals and the capacity of national Governments to define and implement their own social policies, are related problems that are at the core of the search for equity and reduction of poverty and inequality. There are concerns that are central to the integration of social and economic policies and that are part of the ongoing search for coherence of policies in various national and international institutions and decision-making processes. It would seem that these three issues deserve particular attention in the context of the different reviews and events that will take place within the United Nations during 2005.

24. **The General Assembly may wish to recommend that, in the context of the reviews and events that will take place in 2005 within the United Nations, notably the 10-year review of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development and the review of the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly, particular attention be given to the principle of a people-centred approach and its realization in public policies and development strategies. Such an approach is a condition for progress towards the attainment of the goals adopted by the international community, notably the Millennium Development Goals. It requires, in particular, a better understanding and management of the social aspects of globalization, the gearing of national and international macroeconomic policies towards the realization of social goals and the increased capacity of national Governments to pursue their own social policies.**

Notes

[1] *Report of the World Summit for Social Development, Copenhagen, 6-12 March 1995* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.8), chap. I, resolution 1, annex I, para. 14.

[2] *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2003, Supplement No. 6* (E/2003/26), chap. I.B, draft resolution V, para. 2.

[3] See ibid., *1996, Supplement No. 9* (E/1996/29), chap. I, sect. C.

[4] See ibid., *1997, Supplement No. 6* (E/1997/26), chap. I, sect. D, resolution 35/2.

[5] Ibid., "Agreed conclusions on productive employment and sustainable livelihoods", sect. V, para. 22 (a).

[6] See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2002, Supplement No. 6* (E/2002/26), chap. I.D, resolution 40/1, annex.

[7] Ibid., *2003, Supplement No. 6* (E/2003/26), chap. I.B, draft resolution V, para. 7.

Annex

Priority themes considered by the Commission for Social Development: 1996-2006

1996

Substantive theme: Strategies and actions for the eradication of poverty

(a) Formulation of integrated strategies;

(b) Meeting the basic human needs of all;

(c) Promotion of self-reliance and community-based initiatives.

1997

Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development

Priority theme: Productive employment and sustainable livelihoods

(a) The centrality of employment in policy formulation, including a broader recognition of work and employment;

(b) Improving access to productive resources and infrastructure;

(c) Enhanced quality of work and employment.

1998

Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development

Priority theme: Promoting social integration and participation of all people, including disadvantaged and vulnerable groups and persons

(a) Promoting social integration through responsive Government, full participation in society, non-discrimination, tolerance, equality and social justice;

(b) Enhancing social protection, reducing vulnerability and enhancing employment opportunities for groups with specific needs;

(c) Violence, crime and the problem of illicit drugs and substantive abuse as factors of social disintegration.

1999

Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development

Priority theme 1: Social services for all

Priority theme 2: Initiation of the overall review of the implementation of the outcome of the Summit

2000

Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development

Priority theme: Contribution of the Commission to the overall review of the implementation of the outcome of the Summit.

2001

Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development

Priority theme: Enhancing social protection and reducing vulnerability in a globalizing world;

Sub-theme: The role of volunteerism in the promotion of social development.

2002

Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly

Priority theme: Integration of social and economic policy

(a) Social aspects of macroeconomic policies;

(b) Social assessment as a policy tool;

(c) Expenditures in the social sector as a productive factor.

2003

Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly

Priority theme: *National and international cooperation for social development*

(a) Sharing of experiences and practices in social development;

(b) Forging partnerships for social development;

(c) Social responsibility of the private sector;

(d) Impact of employment strategies on social development;

(e) Policies and role of international financial institutions and their effect on national social development strategies.

2004

Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly

Priority theme: Improving public sector effectiveness

2005

Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly

Priority theme: Review of the further implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for social Development and the outcome of the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly

2006

Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly

Priority theme: Review of the first United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (1997-2006).